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ABSTRACT

This practicum paper documents the development and distribution of a handbook for child care administrators designed to increase parent involvement. It provides a review of the literature on parent involvement in day care centers and outlines the process used to develop the 12-page handbook. The handbook includes ways in which to measure the current level of parent involvement in child care settings and suggestions to increase future parent involvement. The handbook was distributed to 10 child care administrators for evaluation. A survey of the administrators found that most responded favorably to the handbook and considered it a useful tool to increase parent involvement. (Ten appendices include copies of cover letters, administrator surveys, administrator comment forms, implementation plan, and the handbook itself. Contains 31 references.) (MDM)

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A MODEL HANDBOOK FOR CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATORS TO INCREASE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

BY

Meredith L. McLane

Cohort 61

A Practicum Report Presented to the

Master's Program in Child Care Administration

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers, in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Date Signature of Student

Abstract

A model handbook for child care administrators to increase parent involvement. McLane, Meredith L., 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Master's Program for Child Care Administration. Descriptors: Parent Involvement/Parent Participation/Parent Cooperation/Teacher-Parent Cooperation/Administration-Parent Cooperation/Administration-Parent Involvement/Parent Education/Children/Preschool/Child Care.

The need for child care has been increasing over the past twenty years as parents have come to depend upon child care centers to supplement the teaching and development of their children. However, many parents simply drop off and pick up their child with little more than passing, informal conversation; involvement is minimal. This may be the result of time, work, and money demands; this may also be the result of language, cultural, or attitude barriers.

The author developed and distributed a handbook to ten administrators of NAEYC-accredited child care centers in Broward County, Florida. The handbook included ways in which to measure the current level of parent involvement in the child care setting and suggestions to increase future parent involvement. After reviewing the handbook, their professional evaluations, opinions, comments, and

suggestions were elicited.

Responses of the panel of administrators toward the handbook were favorable. The strategies suggested in the handbook were not to be implemented by the panel but, rather, critiqued. The administrators had a ten-week implementation period to review and evaluate the handbook.

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Chapter I

Introduction and Background

The Setting in Which the Problem Occurs

The practicum setting involved ten child care centers located in Broward County, Florida. All ten centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (hereafter called NAEYC). Demographics of the centers were similar, but varied in range (Appendix A):

- Programs had been in operation anywhere from two and a half to forty-two years,
- Accreditation held between seven months and seven years,
- Licensed from one hundred five to three hundred fifty children,
- Ages served were consistent from infants to school-age, and
- Staff size ranged from 12 to 50.

All centers were privately-run, except one church center and one temple center. Parent population served was largely middle class with routine variances.

The State of Florida requires that child care centers be licensed through their local county agency; Broward County's licensing agency is Child Care Licensing and Enforcement. Their licensing standards covered eight criteria:

- Minimum standards for child care personnel

- Physical facilities
- First aid treatment and emergency procedures
- Nutrition, food service, and food preparation
- Admission, record keeping, and release of children
- Transportation
- Insurance
- Licensing

While Broward County's standards were sufficient, NAEYC accreditation standards were higher; they had ten criteria for accreditation:

- Interactions among staff and children
- Curriculum
- Staff-Parent interaction
- Staff qualifications and development
- Administration
- Staffing
- Physical environment
- Health and safety
- Nutrition and food service
- Evaluation

Centers voluntarily chose to go through the accreditation process and must pass four eligibility requirements:

- Serve at least ten children including ages birth through five years on a part-day and/or full-day basis. NAEYC does not accredit family day care homes.
- "Have been in operation at least one year prior to receipt of accreditation" (NAEYC, 1)
- Be state or locally licensed.
- The entire program must apply for accreditation (ex., infant program, toddler program, and pre-k program).

The accreditation process has three steps:

- The self study includes early childhood classroom observation, administration report, staff questionnaire, and parent questionnaire. Once improvements have been made, the center reports compliance to the Academy. The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs is the licensing branch of NAEYC.
- An on-site validation is made, to verify the report.
- Accreditation decision is made by a three-person commission.

There is no time limit for centers going through the accreditation process; accreditation is valid for three years. Once accredited, centers must submit annual reports consisting of needs assessments, goal setting, and periodic evaluations. At

the end of the three-year period, centers must conduct a self study and receive another validation visit in order to be re-accredited.

There are 197 NAEYC-accredited child care centers in the state of Florida. Eighteen are in Broward County. The ten centers used in this study were chosen at random.

Student's Role in Setting

The writer was a full time graduate student not working in the child care field; an undergraduate degree in Child and Family Development was held. The writer had worked in the field since 1987, holding positions including assistant teacher, teacher, assistant director, and director. Having held administrative positions in the child care setting, the writer had experienced the wide range in parent involvement, from disinterest to active involvement. Therefore, the writer chose to address this problem for the practicum.

The writer's role in the project setting was that of facilitator. There are over 300 child care centers in Broward County, with only 18 NAEYC accredited. After receiving lists of NAEYC accredited centers for both Broward County and the State of Florida, the writer selected ten NAEYC accredited centers in Broward County as a panel of experts. Their approval to participate was obtained by explanatory letter (Appendix B) and follow-up telephone call.

These administrators were asked demographic questions (Appendix A) about their centers and asked to review and critique a handbook on how-to increase parent involvement in the child care setting. The writer did not visit the practicum sites but maintained communications through telephone and written correspondence.

The center administrators were not asked to carry out any of the parent involvement strategies, but to review and critique the suggestions being made. Administrators kept the handbook and could use any of the strategies enclosed for helping the writer with this practicum. Based on the professional critiques, the handbook was modified before further distribution and before changes of any parent involvement program were made.

Chapter II

The Problem

Problem Statement

To meet the developmental needs of young children by providing an optimum child care environment, parents must be involved at all levels - clerical, classroom activities, field trips, donation of supplies, policy planning, board positions, etc. The writer had witnessed sporadic, limited parent involvement with children's education, administration, and staff of child care centers. With most child care centers, handfuls of parents are actively involved; some parents show interest, but are not currently involved. Most of the parents simply drop off and pick up their child. Therefore, the problem is a lack of active parental involvement in children's classrooms, schools, and education.

When this does not occur, all parties can be affected. Relationships between home and school can be strained and children instinctively pick up on the imbalance. However, when parents and staff work together for the benefit of the child care program and the child, everyone is affected - positively. Most positively affected are the children, as home and school elements come together.

Problem Documentation

Several methods were used to document the problem. The writer's work experiences, previous research, and discussions (with child care staff, administrators, and parents), had shown the need for parent-staff communications and varied parent involvement activities. Researchers "have recognised the need to work **with** parents rather than do things **to** them. Effective relationships between professionals and parents are built on partnership and on mutual respect, with an emphasis on reciprocity that allows people to give as well as to take." (Pugh, 220) "The available studies . . . indicate that most parent-staff conversations typically occur once or twice weekly, are very brief, and involve the exchange of useful information less than half of the time." (Endsley, 54)

The ideal child care center would have an open door policy extended to parents of the center that gets response from the parents. Parent-teacher conferences, open houses and bake sales are what initially come to mind when thinking of parents' roles in school. Ideal involvement would add two-way communication, parents' suggestions being carried out, resources available to parents, volunteering of parents (in classroom activities, clerical duties, board membership, policy forming, donation of supplies, etc.), and would build from that foundation.

The positive benefits that result from using this foundation should be enough to motivate both staff and parents; however, the occurrence of intrinsic pleasure and meeting personal needs may be what is needed for each member to take the first step. Both can be guaranteed if a parent involvement program is properly set up with honest efforts being made by both sides. Nevertheless, the staff and administration must set the standard. In response to the handbook, several administrators noted three possible restrictions to enthusiastic parent involvement programs - economic funds of the center (or lack thereof), time constraints of staff and parents, and the fact that staff have their own family responsibilities.

Analysis of Problem

First, working definitions must be given. By *parents*, the writer is included the many primary caregivers children have: two-income parents, single parents, teen-age-parents, stepparents (Coleman, 15), foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, legal guardians, homosexual parents, surrogate parents, communal families, etc. (Coleman; Morrison) The great diversity in families demands that the people working with these children and their families must adapt and find individual ways to work with each family.

Parent involvement (also called parent participation) was a broad term and,

in this context, should be called family involvement. However, for the purposes of this practicum, involvement was simplified to " . . . an acceptance of equal skills and expertise, of an open-minded sharing of knowledge, skills and experience, and of a sense that each partner brings something different but of equal value to the relationship." (Pugh, 225)

Sutherland went on to define it as " . . . a developmental process that is built over a period of time through intentional planning and effort of every team member, and a process by which parents and teachers work, learn and participate in decision-making experiences in a shared manner." (122) A more extensive role of family involvement would include child care administrators providing continuing education to parents, referring community social services to families, encouraging parents to advocate for all children, cultural considerations, father focuses, community involvement, etc.

There were several categories that parents fell into when discussing participation in their child's child care center. Pugh broke them down as such:

- Non-participation - not involved on a daily basis, may lack confidence, too tired, language or cultural barrier.
- Being there - receptive and responsive, but not active, may attend events, speak to staff.

- Cooperation - intentional contribution, supervised by staff, conferences.
- Collaboration - initiate and work with staff on activities, listen to staff, ultimate decisions and responsibilities lay with staff.
- Partnership - involvement extends to include equal access to information and resources with staff.
- Control - decide and execute decisions, ultimately accountable and responsible for activities, budget, selection of staff, etc. (227-9)

"Parents complain that they have no real input" in child care "and are only used for menial tasks such as running money-raising events, putting up bulletin boards, and helping with field trips. At the same time, teachers attend workshops at professional conferences eager to learn new strategies for gaining greater parent participation in their classrooms . . . If both parents and teachers desire strong parent participation, then why is it not occurring?" (Coleman, 15) Coleman suggested a few reasons: "time demands made upon working parents, policies and practices that relegate parent participation to a low priority, and a lack of teacher training in understanding and working with *all* families." (15)

"The proportion of married women working outside the home rose from 41 percent in 1975 to 62 percent in 1988. This means that more women have less time than ever before to volunteer. . . ." (PTA, 3) "The proportion of children

living in single-parent families is increasing. In 1989, 22 percent of children lived in single-parent families; only 11 percent did so in 1970 . . . Single parents have less free time for parent involvement activities than parents in households where both spouses are in the home." (PTA, 3) "About 13 percent of African-American children under the age of 18 lived in their grandparents' homes in 1989. This was also the case for 5 percent of Hispanic and 3 percent of White children. About half of these 1.2 million children had their mother present in the home, 38 percent had neither parent present, 4 percent had both parents living with them, and 3 percent had only their father present." These statistics proved the point that child care staff must approach every child and his/her family individually; family involvement activities must consider these differences.

Aside from the changing face of families in today's society, many parents bring several other barriers to the child care setting. The National PTA sent out a survey to its presidents, councils, and leaders in 1992 asking them what barriers they faced when trying to involve parents. Of the 4,797 that responded:

- 89% stated parents do not have enough time.
- 32% stated parents feel they have nothing to contribute.
- 32% stated parents do not understand the system; they do not know how to be involved.

- 28% stated lack of child care to attend meetings.
- 25% sensed parents feel intimidated.
- 18% felt parents are not available during the times PTA and school functions are scheduled.
- 15% listed language and cultural differences - PTAs are unable to attract parents of all racial and ethnic groups.
- 11% said parents do not have access to transportation to the school functions.
- 9% thought parents did not feel welcome at the school.
- And 21% listed other barriers (most of them suggesting that PTA leaders feel parents are not interested in being involved). (3)

Besides the intimidations and attitudes parents bring with them to the child care setting, the teaching and administrative staff bring their own prejudices and beliefs. Staff may also have a lack of time, resources, and skills to actively recruit positive parent involvement and communication. Many teachers feel that their job is to take care of the children and facilitate their learning, not to deal with parents. Paired with the long hours, low pay, and many responsibilities, (conducive to burnout and resulting in high turnover), many staff feel they are stretched too thin to take on a parent involvement program as well.

Therefore, the problem of lack of adequate positive parent involvement is well

documented and examples were given. This problem crosses gender lines, economic lines, racial lines, and age lines. With the onslaught of mothers in the work force, society has not yet given parents productive ways in which to divide their time between what must be done (bring in income to support family) and what should be done (remain actively involved in child's educational and developmental life). Some suggestions are given in this handbook.

Chapter III

Goal and Objectives

Goal of Practicum

The goal of this practicum was to come up with an effective handbook that child care administrators could use to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers; subsequently, the administrators could easily carry out the suggestions offered to increase the level of parents' involvement. The developed tool was distributed to a panel for their review, evaluation, and critique. This panel consisted of ten administrators of NAEYC-accredited child care centers.

Objectives of Practicum

After the ten-week implementation phase of the practicum, the panel had read the handbook, had a chance to ask questions about strategies suggested, evaluated and critique the tool.

Objective # One: 90% of the panel will respond favorably to the form, style, and format of the tool.

Objective # Two: 80% of the panel will evaluate the tool positively.

Objective # Three: 80% will critique the tool favorably.

Objective # Four: After the critique process, the tool will need to be revised less than 20%.

The degree of attainment of these objectives was measured from surveys, a questionnaire, and a form included with the tool. Fortunately, with the panel consisting of ten members, 80% and 90% was not difficult to measure.

Chapter IV

Solution Strategy

Review of Existing Approaches

Through educational studies, research, and preschool work experience, this writer discovered the need for child care centers to have programs encouraging active participation from its clients - the parents. More and more, professionals in the field are realizing this as well. A good amount of literature in the field covers ways parents can become involved in their child's educational setting and ways professionals can gain the needed skills to carry this out.

A review of the literature presented similar, but varied suggestions on parent participation in child care. Bjorkland and Burger (1987) gave guidelines for parent-teacher conferences, including how to prepare for the conference in advance, items to strive for when talking with parents in the conference setting, and follow-up strategies to observe after the parents leave. They suggested "conferences offer a rich opportunity to build communication and understanding between the home and school. Their value to parents, staff, and children depends upon the active participation of each person involved." (31) Parent-teacher conferences are a vital way to keep parents informed and up-to-date on their

child's progress and is a first step in involving parents.

On the other hand, Swap (1987) submitted "advisory boards are very useful for transforming information about what parents want into specific activities and programs." (75) She described the functions of an advisory board, gave sample agendas, discussed how to manage communications, and presented elements that ensure an effective board. Besides advisory boards, Swap discusses ad hoc committees, task forces, and informal problem-solving groups as alternate ways for parents to become involved.

"Task forces and informal problem-solving groups generally function within a specific time-frame on a single topic. Advisory boards usually deal with a variety of topics within the context of an ongoing program or mission, such as planning parent education programs, establishing a program for parent volunteers, or contributing to long-range planning." (Swap, 98) Advisory boards may provide a purpose and be a positive way for parents to participate, however, the writer would suggest adding a board after some initial steps of involvement were found successful for both staff and parents.

Sutherland (1991) introduced several roles for parents to take on in involvement. These included parents as policy and decision makers, parents as participators in classroom/center/school activities, parents as teacher assistants,

and parents as community liaisons. "A well planned and implemented process, supporting the involvement of parents in the program designed to teach their children, can both affirm and empower them as parents." (125) "Mutual respect between parents and teachers, and readiness on the part of teachers to accept parents as capable partners in the goals to meet children's needs, is required for parents to feel welcome and needed. Teachers need to take the initiative and responsibility to extend welcome and need." (125-6)

Albert gave parents many suggestions on how to become involved with their children, the teachers, and the school community. These varied from simply talking to their child at home about their school day to allowing children to see that making mistakes is OK and helps everyone learn. Tips concerning their child's teachers included:

- "Happygrams" (bright, short thank you notes to the teacher when their child displays new skill from school).
- Telephone talk (5-10 minute catch-up conversations with teachers).
- Banish blaming (taking a 'no-fault' approach when their child experiences difficulty in school).
- Ask for advice.
- Lend a hand.

- Beat the clock (punctuality with conferences).
- Be prepared (with a list of questions for conferences).
- Information, please (giving teachers any needed information about family or child, as well as any changes that might effect school behavior). (4-5)

Knowler (1988) proposed excellent strategies that teachers could use to orient parents and volunteers to their classrooms. Suggestions included setting the classroom up to accommodate parents and holding regularly scheduled events (potluck luncheons, workdays, home visits, parent orientations, monthly meetings, etc.). (9) Slack (1993) gave similar suggestions for teachers to use in preparing for parents in their classrooms and discussed other ways to keep in touch with parents. These consisted of personal notes sent home, notes written by the teacher and child together, sending home activity packs for parent and child to do together, brief telephone calls, classroom newsletters, and monthly calendars sent home with daily activities for parent and child. (49)

Stonehouse (5) posed, with parent involvement "the main aim . . . is to increase parents' competence and confidence in themselves as well as their pleasure in and understanding of the child. These things come about not primarily through attending meetings or helping with projects (though they can contribute), but rather in the daily interchange between caregivers and parents who have a

relationship of mutual respect." In another article, Stonehouse (1980) said "the most meaningful way to assess the quality of relationships between parents and staff is to look at what happens on a day-to-day basis as parents come and go in the centre." (6)

She continued with twenty guidelines for staff in "Relating to Parents Daily ":

- Have an attitude of respect toward parents.
- Be cautious giving advice to parents.
- An open door makes parents feel welcome.
- Give clear expectations of parents and center from beginning.
- At first, have one caregiver relate to parents.
- Use parents as a source of information about the child.
- Involve parents in decisions about their child.
- Talk with parents.
- Get to know parents personally.
- Realize parents are people and have other concerns.
- Share everything positive about their child.
- Share unpleasant information more sparingly.
- Avoid stereotyping parents.

- Accept individual differences in parents.
- Acknowledge that you may not relate well to some parents; maybe other staff can.
- As staff, support each other with difficult parents.
- Be a good listener.
- Know the limits of your own competence; refer parents if need be.
- See things from parents' perspective.
- Keep trying with difficult parents. (6-7)

On parent involvement, Morrison (1991) believes "parents, children, and the program are all part of the process; consequently, all three parties should benefit from a well-planned program of parent involvement. Nonetheless, the focus in parent/child/family interactions is the parent, and early childhood educators must work with and through parents if they want to be successful." (422) After suggesting three approaches to parent involvement - "task approach, process approach, developmental approach" (422-3), he provided professionals with methods for involving parents and activities. These included schoolwide activities, communication activities, educational activities, service activities and decision activities. (425-6) As with much of the other literature, parent-teacher conferences were discussed.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly since (the review panel members for this practicum are from NAEYC-accredited centers), Bredekamp (1991) offered NAEYC guidelines for staff-parent interaction. (See Appendix C) The goal given for this important topic was "parents are well informed about and welcome as observers and contributors to the program." (26) Subsequently, the rationale was "young children are integrally connected to their families. Programs cannot adequately meet the needs of children unless they also recognize the importance of the child's family and develop strategies to work effectively with families. All communication between programs and families should be based on the concept that parents are and should be the principal influence in children's lives." (26) Briefly, the eight strategies were as follows:

- Provide written information to new and prospective families. This would include program philosophies, operating procedures, hours of operation, etc.
- Develop an orientation process, considering the pre-enrollment visit, parent orientation meeting, gradual introduction of children to the program, etc.
- Establish positive, two-way communication.
- Include open door and involvement policies.
- Have systems for ongoing, day-to-day written and verbal communication.
- Hold regular teacher-parent conferences. Discuss children's progresses,

accomplishments, difficulties, etc.

- Allow parents to be informed about the program and its curriculum, professional issues, policy changes, etc. through newsletters, bulletin boards, and other means.
- Ensure communication between parents and staff in order to provide smooth transitions for children. (26-29)

In summary, a review of the literature revealed much repetition of important issues and skills needed regarding parent involvement. In this practicum setting, the writer presented many of these issues, barriers, activities, and processes in a tool developed to address the need for increased, active parent involvement.

Proposed Solution Strategy

The purpose of this practicum was to develop a tool addressing the need for increased levels of active parent participation in child care centers. The solution strategy chosen was to develop a handbook that would be reviewed, evaluated, and critiqued by a panel of experts in the child care field. A cover letter sent with the handbook described the steps the panel would need to follow. (See Appendix D) The subject of the handbook was parent involvement. With it, child care administrators could initially learn about parent involvement; secondly (using the strategies suggested) measure the current level of parent involvement in their

centers and; lastly, increase that level. Within this practicum project, the panel of experts were not asked to implement any of the strategies suggested in the handbook, but rather to perform a professional review and critique of the handbook and its contents.

Given this solution strategy, the objectives were obtained through review and documentation of the panel's survey, questionnaire, and form evaluating the proposed handbook. Objective number one (90% of the panel will respond favorably to the handbook's form, style, and format) was measured on a continuum provided in the survey distributed to the panel. (See Appendix E) The handbook was able to meet this objective if written in a clear and concise manner.

Objective number two (80% of the panel will evaluate the handbook positively) was measured in a similar way, provided by answers to a questionnaire filled out by panel members. (See Appendix F) This objective was accomplished if the panel agreed the handbook covered the needed material to explain, document, and increase parent involvement in the child care setting.

The third objective (80% of the panel will critique the handbook favorably) was assessed through analysis of the panel's responses on the survey provided with the handbook. (See Appendix G) Given NAEYC's standards, objective number three was achieved if, after professional review, the panel responded favorably to

the subject, content, and composition of the handbook.

The last objective (after the critique process, the handbook will need to be revised less than 20%) was appraised after reviewing the panel's comments and suggestions given on the last form included with the handbook. (See Appendix H) Considering the panel's expert opinions and suggestions, objective number four could be attained when final editing and revising of the handbook (based on the given comments and suggestions) revealed less than 20% of the handbook had to be amended. If these objectives were met, this handbook could be distributed to various child care centers looking to increase their level of parent participation. If not met, the handbook would be revised until it met the given objectives.

The proposed handbook was divided into points including:

I. Introduction - Parent Participation

II. Obstacles to Parent Participation

III. Current Level of Parent Participation

- A. Parent Survey
- B. Staff Survey

IV. Parent Participation Program

- A. Philosophy
- B. Communication

C. Ways to Involve Parents

1. Administrators

2. Child Care Setting

3. Teachers

4. Conferences

5. Activities

V. References

The writer's role was that of facilitator; the handbook was written and distributed to the panel. Communication was maintained through telephone contact (and letters, if needed). After writing and sending the handbook, the writer assumed the responsibility of maintaining adequate contact with the panel, making sure not to have influenced their opinions, but rather to help the process of evaluation if needed. Also, the writer must have reviewed and compiled the information gathered in a professional and timely manner.

Successful completion of the solution strategy was dependent upon the involvement of the panel of experts. The strategy could not have been completed without these administrators, since the writer was not currently working in the field of child care. Cost was minimal, since parent involvement activities were not being altered in any of the practicum sites; additional approval was not required,

after having received initial approval of participation from the ten administrators.

The writer monitored the implementation phase of the practicum through telephone contact with the panel during week three. The panel submitted the evaluation, surveys, and form during week seven; the writer again monitored the implementation by telephone contact during week nine. No major obstacles were anticipated. One possible anticipated obstacle would have been late submission of data by one or more panel members; anticipated reasons for this would have included change of staff and/or time restraints placed upon administrators causing the handbook to receive lesser priority. This was addressed by continual contact by the writer and, perhaps, personal assistance at the practicum site.

In conclusion, "only if child care involves sharing between parents and caregivers, working together for the child's benefit, can it in the long run be beneficial to children and families." (Stonehouse, 6)

> Parents are the most significant influence in a child's life, and the early childhood program should organize strategies and methods that build working partnerships. A good teacher-parent partnership begins with honest, reliable and sincere communication. Teachers and parents can communicate and work together in many ways. Parents need to be encouraged to become actively involved in the child's care and education. Building an effective and mutually satisfying partnership between the home and school requires the belief that teachers and parents have much to share and communicate. If children are going to achieve and grow in an early childhood program, parents must have a better understanding of their child's personal development and learning styles as well as the school's program, activities and teaching methods. (Gelfer, 164-5)

Chapter V

Results

The problem was a lack of active parent involvement in children's care and development in the child care setting. The solution chosen was to develop and distribute a handbook to administrators of ten centers in Broward County, Florida. With this handbook, ideally, teachers and administrators could measure the current level of parent involvement in their center and increase that level.

The goal of this practicum was to come up with an effective tool/handbook that child care administrators could use to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers; subsequently, the administrators could easily carry out the suggestions offered to increase the level of parents' involvement. Given the overall success of the practicum's objectives, this goal has been met.

The panel of administrators had ten weeks with which to read and review the handbook. During that time, they had to evaluate and critique the handbook and fill out the surveys/questionnaires with comments and suggestions. The evaluation forms were to be mailed back to the writer. A few of the evaluation forms were received by the writer earlier than required and some were received on schedule. However, a few were not obtained by the time allotted. The writer followed up with several telephone calls and submitted a copy of the evaluation forms as well

as a fax number to assist in receiving the completed forms. Fortunately, with the format of this practicum report, other work was able to be completed while awaiting the completed forms. Still, the delay had been anticipated; telephone calls by the writer and the length of time allotted to the administrators during the implementation phase was thought to have corrected the problem before it arose. The delay in receiving some evaluation forms still occurred.

Objective #1

The first objective of the practicum was to have 90% of the ten administrators to evaluate the form, style, and format of the handbook favorably. "Favorably" in this context constitutes responses of 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) on the "Handbook Review Survey: Form, Style, And Format". Favorably would be above 3 (neutral) or average. On this survey, 100% of the responses were 4 = agree or 5 = strongly agree.

Objective #2

The second objective was to have 80% of the administrators evaluate the handbook positively. Again, positively was considered a rating of 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) on the "Handbook Evaluation Questionnaire: Content". In actuality, 92.5% responded positively, while 7.5 responded below 4 (agree).

Objective #3

On the third objective of the practicum, it was hoped that 80% of the administrators would respond favorably to the "Administrator Critique Survey". "Favorably" meant choosing true as opposed to false on this survey. In fact, 93.3% did so.

Objective #4

On the last objective of the practicum, the handbook would have to be revised less than 20% after the evaluation and critique process. The administrator's comments and suggestions would be taken into consideration and the handbook amended based on this. Before amending, the body of the handbook consisted of twelve pages. Therefore, in order to be revised less than 20%, roughly less than two and a half pages of the handbook's content could be changed. In fact, 12.5% of the handbook was revised/amended, therefore, the objective was met.

Stated Objectives	Actual Results
1. 90% will respond favorably to the form, style, and format of the handbook.	1. 100% responded favorably
2. 80% will evaluate the handbook positively.	2. 92.5% evaluated positively
3. 80% will critique the handbook favorably.	3. 93.3% critiqued favorably

4. After the critique process, the handbook will need to be revised less than 20%.	4. 12.5% revised

The outcome of the handbook evaluation process was revealing. The writer had approached the handbook as another research paper, rather than a tool to be used in the field by professionals. The parent survey was developed without taking into account that many child care centers serve low-income, underprivileged, and non-English speaking parents. The survey was revised with this in mind. As of this time, there are no further plans for the parent involvement handbook. Results of the surveys and questionnaires are listed in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Table 1

HANDBOOK REVIEW SURVEY: FORM, STYLE, AND FORMAT

RESULTS

Rating Scale: 1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

Questions	Number of responses for rating scale 5	4	3	2	1
1. The writing style of handbook is orderly and clear.	5	5	0	0	0
2. The handbook is written in a manner that makes it easy to read and follow.	4	6	0	0	0
3. The format of the handbook is laid out in a manner that makes it easy to understand and follow.	4	6	0	0	0

Comments Given: "The handbook should give suggestions/examples, not review philosophies all ready known by administrators. Shift in point of view is distracting. Difficult to follow train of thought."

Table 2

HANDBOOK EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE: CONTENT

RESULTS

Rating Scale: 1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

Questions	Number of responses for rating scale 5	4	3	2	1
1. Enough information was provided in the handbook to adequately explain parent involvement.	6	4	0	0	0
2. The data provided in the handbook was adequate for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers.	5	3	1	1	0
3. Enough material was provided in the handbook for child care administrators to use to increase the level of parent involvement in their centers.	4	5	1	0	0
4. The quality of the measurement tools provided in the handbook for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers was good.	4	5	0	1	0

Table 3

ADMINISTRATOR CRITIQUE SURVEY

RESULTS

Rating Scale: True
False

Questions	Number of responses for rating scale True	False
1. The material covering the subject of parent involvement would be beneficial to child care administrators seeking to increase the level of involvement at their centers.	9	1
2. The suggestions given in the handbook regarding ways to involve parents in the child care center were plentiful and covered all aspects of the child care setting.	10	0
3. The measurement tools provided for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement were broad enough to be used after a program of parent involvement was revised.	9	1

Comments Given: "Elaborate on examples given. Remember, the handbook is directed at administrators, you might not suggest further research. Some suggestions are more workable than others. Parent survey may be intimidating to parents; too lengthy. Shorten the parent survey and word more simply. Staff survey is minimal, weak, not detailed enough."

Table 4

ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDBOOK

RESULTS

Comments Given to the Following Subjects:

1. Readability of the handbook:

"Double space between paragraphs and bullets. Edit redundant excerpts. Sounds like a 'paper'; too many quotes. Make it less technical; give more explanations of activities. There are lots of handouts from other books. The writing sounds opinionated, like the writer has all ready judged the reader."

2. Strategies suggested in the handbook:

"I added three evening activities into the teachers' contracts; they agree to attend and participate when they are hired and sign the contract. When do we stop with difficult parents? Need to take teachers' family lives into consideration. Safety needs to be considered with after hour activities in families' communities. Elaborate on strategies. Address the problem of staff burnout. Discuss discretion of parent volunteers (discussing other kids' behavior outside of classroom with other parents). Keep in mind bad neighborhoods when visiting parents/families."

3. Quality of teacher and parent surveys provided in handbook:

"Edit parent survey, add to staff survey. Intent is unclear (negative?). Parent survey is limited to English-speaking parents and those that read well."

4. Selection of activities recommended for parent involvement/participation:

"Give more detail/explanation. Please give more ideas for topics for meetings. Group suggestions into topics with more details."

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The administrators were eager to participate in the practicum and were very helpful and forthcoming with any needed information. A handful of centers had existing, structured parent involvement programs and were looking forward to compare their program with the suggestions in the handbook. All ten of the administrators said they benefitted from the handbook and were anxious to try many of the suggestions given.

In hindsight, it is felt by this writer that the first three objectives could have been set higher. Objective one (90%) was met with 100%; objective two (80%) was met with 92.5%; and objective three (80%) was met with 93.3%. The first survey was evaluating the form and style of the handbook and-in the future-should be held accountable to 95% compliance. In this writer's opinion, to expect 100% agreement on any objective is setting a future writer up for failure. The second questionnaire was measuring the handbook's content and (again, in hindsight) the objective could have been raised to 85-90%. Lastly, the third objective was met but could have been raised to 85-90%. The rating scale has been broadened from "True or False" to "Agree, Disagree, and Not Sure". As for the fourth objective, 20% still seems to be a fair level for judgement.

If this practicum writer were to follow up this practicum project and report, she might consult with others in the early childhood field locally, add local resources and distribute the revised handbook to interested child care administrators for a fee. One thing this writer learned through working in the field and researching this practicum is that no matter what the current level of parent involvement currently exists in any child care center, it can certainly be increased by having a renewed interest and putting forth honest efforts with both staff and parents.

Finally, the writer had come across many ways to increase communication with parents and staff, which leads to increased parent involvement. Many more examples and suggestions were discovered upon further research of the subject for this practicum. Therefore, this writer would suggest continued research, brainstorming sessions and open communication with both staff and parents in order to reveal more ways in which to increase the level of parent involvement in other child care centers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. How long has the child care center been open?

_____

2. How long has the child care center been NAEYC-accredited?

_____

3. How many children is the child care center licensed for?

_____

4. What ages does the child care center serve?

_____

5. How many staff are employed by the child care center?

_____

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PANEL

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PANEL

November 14, 1994

Dear Child Care Administrator,

My name is Meredith McLane; I am a Graduate student at Nova/ Southeastern University studying child care administration. I am contacting NAEYC-Accredited centers in Broward County to ask for assistance in completing my studies. The topic of my senior practicum is "How child care administrators can increase parent involvement in their centers."

If you decide to participate, I would send you a Handbook for Administrators. You would review it, evaluate it, critique its quality and return an enclosed questionnaire with your professional opinions and comments/suggestions.

For participating, you may use any of the strategies suggested freely. I will follow this letter up with a telephone call during the week of November 21, 1994. Thank you for your time; I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Meredith McLane

APPENDIX C

NAEYC STAFF-PARENT INTERACTION STANDARDS

C. Staff-Parent Interaction

GOAL: Parents are well informed about and welcome as observers and contributors to the program.

RATIONALE: Young children are integrally connected to their families. Programs cannot adequately meet the needs of children unless they also recognize the importance of the child's family and develop strategies to work effectively with families. All communication between programs and families should be based on the concept that parents are and should be the principal influence in children's lives.

C-1. Information about the program is given to new and prospective families, including written descriptions of the program's philosophy (B-1), operating procedures (E-2), and plans for meeting children's nutritional needs (I-1).

All programs need a written statement of philosophy and goals that is readily available to parents and staff members. Written statements of philosophy and policy do not ensure good communication but they provide a basis for good communication and understanding between parents and staff. Such information enables parents to make an informed decision about the best possible arrangements for their child. Providing information about children's nutritional needs is especially important when parents rather than the program supply the child's food. See *Healthy Young Children: A Manual for Programs* (Kendrick, Kaufmann, & Messenger, 1991) for nutritious snack ideas to give to parents. Programs with significant numbers of non-English-speaking families need to provide materials in the parents' native language.

C-2. A process has been developed for orienting children and parents to the program that may include a pre-enrollment visit, parent orientation meeting, or gradual introduction of children to the program.

The transition from home can be a difficult one and must be planned. There are numerous methods of orientation for both children and parents. The criterion does not require that one particular method be implemented but it does require that an orientation for both children and parents be provided.

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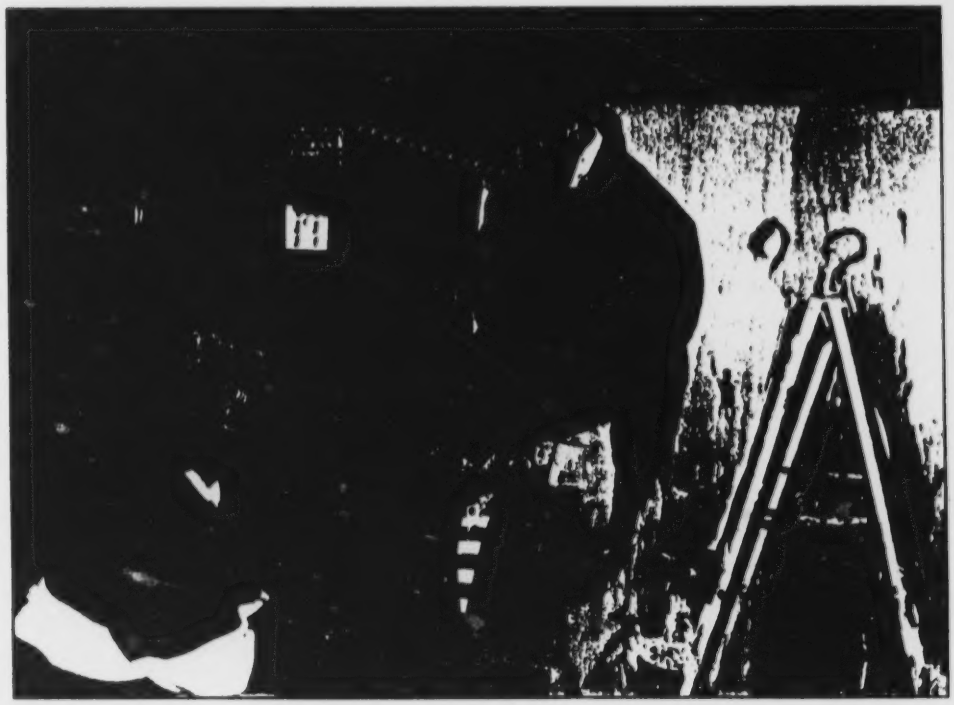
C-3. Staff and parents communicate frequently about childrearing practices in the home and at the program in order to minimize potential conflicts and confusion for children. Staff give parents specific ideas for promoting children's healthy development and learning at home.

Parents have the responsibility for selecting the best possible arrangement for their children. It is very important that parents are informed of the program's philosophy so that they can make an educated choice for their children. It is also important that parents and staff discuss their views on childrearing to minimize potential conflicts and confusion for children. Staff do not capitulate to parents' demands, but they should demonstrate respect for parents as the principal influence in the child's life. The expertise of early childhood professionals is a rich source of information to assist parents in their complex roles, and the relationship between staff and parents is an excellent opportunity to support parents.



Staff and parents communicate frequently about childrearing practices in the home and at the program.

C-4. Parents are welcome visitors in the program at all times (for example, to observe, eat lunch with a child, or volunteer to help in the classroom). Parents and other family members are encouraged to be involved in the program in various ways, taking into consideration working parents and those with little spare time.

The program's policy should openly encourage parent involvement. Parents should be free to visit the program unannounced at any time.

C-5. A verbal and/or written system is established for sharing day-to-day happenings that may affect children. Changes in a child's physical or emotional state are reported regularly.

Since verbal systems are not always workable in programs where several staff members interact with children during the day, written systems are often necessary. Such communication systems allow for reporting important information about children to parents and encourage parents to communicate about their children to staff.

In good quality programs parents are welcome visitors at all times.

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C-6. Conferences should be held at least once a year and at other times, as needed, to discuss children's progress, accomplishments, and difficulties at home and at the program.

Conferences do not take the place of daily communication but allow opportunities for in-depth discussion of children's development, and for parents to ask questions, express concerns, or make suggestions about the program. Conferences should be scheduled at least annually, but may be called as requested by either parents or staff.

C-7. Parents are informed about the program and the curriculum, and about policy or regulatory changes and other critical issues that could potentially affect the program and/or the early childhood profession, through newsletters, newspaper articles, bulletin boards, and other appropriate means.

Individual programs may be as creative as possible in communication efforts as long as such efforts are seen by parents as effective. Programs communicate with parents about critical changes that directly affect program quality such as licensing or legislation.

C-8. Staff and parents communicate to ensure that children experience smooth transitions from one program to another during the day. Staff and parents communicate to ensure that the programs from which children come and to which they go from one year to the next provide continuity over time.

Transitions are change and all change is stressful. For young children who have limited experience and few well-developed coping strategies, change can be very stressful. When children move from one program to another or from one group to another within a program, smooth, less stressful transitions are more likely when staff, administrators, and parents work together.

APPENDIX D

HANDBOOK COVER LETTER TO PANEL

APPENDIX D

HANDBOOK COVER LETTER TO PANEL

February 3, 1995

Dear Child Care Administrator,

My name is Meredith McLane, a graduate student a Nova Southeastern University. I contacted you in late November regarding my senior practicum "How Child Care Administrators Can Increase Parent Involvement." The handbook is enclosed.

I do not need you to implement any of the strategies suggested in the handbook; you are being asked to review, evaluate, and critique it. After reviewing the handbook, please fill out the enclosed surveys (2), questionnaire, and form with your professional opinions, comments, and suggestions.

Schedule:

February 5-11, 1995: Please read over the handbook.

February 12-18, 1995: Review of the handbook's form, style, and format. I will call during this week to answer any questions you may have regarding the handbook or the processes of evaluation.

February 19-25, 1995: Further review of the handbook; fill out Review Survey.

February 26-March 4, 1995: Evaluate the content covered in the handbook; fill out Evaluation Questionnaire: Content.

March 5-11, 1995: Critique the subject, content, and composition of the handbook; fill out Administrator Critique Survey. Fill out Administrator's Comments and Suggestions Form.

March 12-18, 1995: Please mail the surveys, questionnaire, and form by this time. These can be mailed separately, as they are completed or together at this time.

I will call during the week of March 19th to clarify any needed points in the surveys, questionnaire, or form. Please do not hesitate to call me at any time with any questions or obstacles you may have. My telephone number is (305)792-7767. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Meredith McLane

APPENDIX E

TEN-WEEK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

APPENDIX E

Ten Week Implementation Plan

Week One: The handbook was assembled and distributed to the panel.

Week Two: The handbook was read by the panel.

Week Three: The panel did review the handbook. The writer called mid-week to answer any questions the panel may have had.

Week Four: Further review of the handbook by the panel.

Week Five: The panel evaluated the handbook.

Week Six: The panel critiqued the handbook, included comments and suggestions.

Week Seven: Surveys, evaluations, and forms were submitted by the panel. Data was gathered by the writer.

Week Eight: Data was compiled by the writer.

Week Nine: The writer would call the panel to clarify any needed points contained in the surveys/questionnaire/form.

Week Ten: Data further assembled by writer and handbook revised.

APPENDIX F

HANDBOOK FOR CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATORS

TO INCREASE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

HANDBOOK FOR CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATORS

TO INCREASE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Contents

I. Introduction - Parent Participation

II. Obstacles

III. Current Level of Parent Participation

- A. Parent Survey
- B. Staff Survey

IV. Parent Participation Program

- A. Philosophy
- B. Communication
- C. Ways to Involve Parents
  1. Administrators
  2. Child Care Setting
  3. Teachers
  4. Conferences
  5. Activities

V. Results

I. Introduction

The need for child care has been increasing over the past twenty years and parents have come to depend upon child care centers to supplement the teaching and development of their children. However as you know, many parents simply drop off and pick up their child with little more than passing, informal conversation; involvement is minimal. This handbook was developed for child care administrators to better understand the facets of parent involvement. In it, you (the child care administrator) will gain insight into the obstacles of parent involvement; will be able to measure the current level of parent involvement in your center; and, using the suggestions in this handbook, increase that level.

In order to provide an optimum child care environment (thus meeting the developmental needs of young children), parents must be involved at all levels - clerical, classroom activities, field trips, donation of supplies, policy planning, board positions, etc. I have witnessed sporadic, limited parent involvement with the education, administration, and staff of child care centers. With most centers, handfuls of parents are actively involved; some parents show interest, but are not currently involved. How does your center rate in parent involvement?

The ideal center would have an open door policy extended to parents of the center that gets response. Parent-teacher conferences, open houses and bake sales

are what normally come to mind when thinking of parents' role in school. Ideal involvement would add two-way communication, parents' suggestions carried out, resources available to parents, volunteering of parents, and would build from that foundation. If a parent involvement program is properly set up with honest efforts made by both sides, everyone will benefit - children, staff, parents. However, you - the administrator - and the staff must set the standard.

Throughout this handbook, I will refer to parents, but with today's changing society, the term *parent* refers to the many primary caregivers children have. Two-income parents, single parents, teen-age parents, stepparents, foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, legal guardians, homosexual parents, surrogate parents, communal families, and several more would be included in this definition. In this handbook, I am not suggesting family involvement, but the involvement of the person(s) that is immediately in charge of the children in your center. Also, throughout this handbook, parent involvement and parent participation will be used interchangeably.

II. Obstacles

The National PTA (1992) address several obstacles to parent involvement in their handbook "A Leader's Guide to Parent and Family Involvement."

OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS
1. Time. Time constraints of working parents; scheduling of activities is often inconvenient for parents.	Be flexible in scheduling meetings - morning, afternoon, evening, weekend. Go to the parents - have meetings at community centers, apartment complexes, workplaces, places of worship. Teachers' families and time constraints need to be considered.
2. Not valued. Feelings of intimidation; may feel they have nothing worthy of contributing; may have had bad experiences when they were in school.	Extend a personal welcome to parents who are withdrawn or uncomfortable. Learn their interests and abilities.
3. Don't know how to contribute. May have talents, but don't know how to go about contributing.	Don't wait for parents to offer to help. Conduct a talent survey.
4. Not understanding the system. Preschool is the first introduction to school systems, may parents are not familiar with how to be involved.	Provide a parent handbook covering rules, procedures, where to find answers to common questions; include phone numbers. Add pictures of center staff.
5. Child care. Parents may feel discouraged from bringing their children to the event.	Find an available room and provide safe, quality child care. Ask for volunteers to babysit.

OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS
6. Language barrier. Might not understand newsletters, flyers or speakers at meetings.	Have printed materials translated. Perhaps have an interpreter at meetings.
7. Cultural differences. Our manners may embarrass or offend families from other cultures; meetings may conflict with religious observances.	Increase group awareness and be sensitive. Know the religious holidays and observances of all groups in your center.
8. Transportation. Lack of transportation or access to parking during school hours keeps parents from visiting with the teachers and volunteering in the school.	Mark parking spaces with "visitors only"; Go to parents, or call them. Hold small group meetings in community centers, parents' homes, etc. Bus parents to special events.
9. Not welcomed. Parents feel the message that they need not interfere.	Urge parent involvement training for all staff; make parents feel welcome to drop in during the day. Post welcome signs in all languages at the center.
10. Parents in need. Many parents in low-income communities are simply overwhelmed. They barely have energy to meet their personal needs, much less volunteer in the center.	Provide information and links to community services. After parents' personal needs are met, they can address the educational needs of their children. Create relationships with many government agencies/services.
11. Low literacy level. Affects understanding of notes and newsletters sent home.	Call on the phone. Provide more face-to-face exchange of information.
12. Snobbery. Many parents view the staff or administration as a clique that exclude parents or minorities or newcomers	Actively involve parents that are representative of the children at the center.

OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS
13. Jargon. Many parents feel put down or confused when staff use professional jargon.	Urge staff to be simple and direct in language.
14. Boring meetings. Busy parents don't take valuable time to come to meetings that are dull or that don't meet their needs.	Make sure there is a purpose to any meeting; shorten the business part. Get right to the speaker or workshop. Make meetings more inviting in a relaxed setting. (4-6)

Besides the intimidations and attitudes parents bring with them to the center, the teaching and administrative staff bring their own prejudices and beliefs to the setting. Staff may also have a lack of time, resources, and skills to actively recruit positive parent involvement and communication. Many teachers feel that their job is to take care of the children and facilitate their learning, not to deal with parents. Paired with the long hours, low pay, and many responsibilities (conducive to burnout and resulting in high turnover), many staff feel they are stretched too thin to take on a parent involvement program as well. It is your responsibility to get staff motivated about involving the parents of the children. Results can be overwhelming. However, with your own tasks to juggle, you may want to determine how much emphasis parent involvement receives at your center.

III. Current Level

After reviewing some possible obstacles to parent involvement, begin to document some barriers that may be present in your center. This can be accomplished through parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, or a short questionnaire. Documentation of the barriers can be used to develop policies that are more likely to work with your parents. Recommendations for parent participation should consider the resources and expertise of the parents. Offer parents a range of support, partnership, and leadership. (Coleman, 16)

In his book Early Childhood Education Today, George Morrison describes three approaches child care centers take with parent involvement. First is the task approach; the staff let parents help with specific tasks that support the center. Parents would help as tutors, aides, monitors, fund raisers, field trip monitors, and clerical helpers. (422) Center staff are most comfortable with this approach. Second is the process approach. Here, "parents are encouraged to participate in areas that are important to the educational process, such as curriculum planning, task forces and committees . . . Teachers often think parents lack the necessary skills to help in certain areas, but with some preparation, assistance, and opportunity to participate, many parents are extremely effective." (423) The developmental approach is last; with this orientation, "parents develop skills that

will benefit themselves, children, schools, teachers, families and, at the same time, enhance the process of parent involvement." (423)

You may wish to analyze your center's approach to parent involvement. Does the center **allow** parents to perform menial tasks or are the parents **truly** involved at many levels and in many ways? Are all parents invited to participate or is it a tightly-knit clique? Are parents made to feel as partners in their children's education or do teachers exude a superior attitude?

The next step is to elicit some feedback from the main people that will be involved in the participation program - the parents and staff. Included are two surveys, adapted from the National PTA's (1992) "A Leader's Guide to Parent and Family Involvement" (12-13). Once distributed, filled out, and collected, you will get a better understanding of where your center stands concerning a parent involvement program and the needs and wishes of parents and staff.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

Our center needs your help to plan parent involvement programs. Parent involvement is fun, informative, and benefits everyone - children, parents, staff, center. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey and return it to the Director.

1. I would like to participate in the following workshops:
   - ___ Children's developmental stages
   - ___ Infant concerns in child care
   - ___ Coping with the "Terrible Two's"
   - ___ Discipline/Behavior management
   - ___ Toilet training
   - ___ Improving my child's self esteem
   - ___ Building parenting skills
   - ___ Childproofing my home
   - ___ Preparing for kindergarten
   - ___ Other

---

2. I would like these parenting programs to be held:
   - ___ In the child care center
   - ___ In the home of a parent in my neighborhood/area
   - ___ In a community center
   - ___ In the workplace
   - ___ Other

---

3. I would be willing to hold such a session:
   ___ Yes ___ No

4. The best time for me to attend these meetings:

_____

5. I would be interested in participating in a small group coffee discussion hour at the center:

___ Yes ___ No

Best time: _____

6. I feel that I can talk openly with my child's teacher.

___ Yes ___ No ___ To some degree

7. I feel that I can talk openly with my child's director.

___ Yes ___ No ___ To some degree

8. I am well informed about what my child is doing at the child care center.

___ Yes ___ No ___ To some degree

9. I feel that my child's teacher needs to be aware of home problems that may affect my child's school behavior.

___Agree ___Disagree

10. The following are effective forms of communication for me with the teacher/center:

	Yes	No	To Some Degree
Open houses	___	___	_____
Age-level orientations	___	___	_____
Conferences	___	___	_____
Daily reports sent home	___	___	_____

11. I would like to volunteer by:

___ Performing clerical duties for center
___ Helping in my child's classroom
___ Organizing a center event
___ Participating on an advisory committee
___ Other

_____

12. I would like to see the following made available at the center:

___ Parent resource center
___ Evening child care
___ Weekend child care
___ Parent support group
___ Other

_____

13. I have the following hobbies and work experience that I would be willing to share:

_____

_____

14. I believe parent, family, and community involvement at the child care center should be strengthened in the following ways:

_____

_____

_____

Optional:

Name _____

Best time to contact _____

Phone _____

STAFF SURVEY - PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Dear staff member:

ABC child care center is developing ways to encourage parent, family and community support of our center. The information you provide will help us better serve the entire center. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey and return it to _____

Name _____

Best time to contact _____

Class/Age _____

1. Do you currently have parents or other family members volunteering in your classroom or for other activities?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, what are their tasks?

_____

_____

_____

2. Would you consider using parents/community volunteers in your classroom?

___ Yes ___ No

If no, why not?

_____

_____

_____

3. What are your current needs for assistance?

___ Materials:

___ Books
___ Toys
___ Visual aids
___ Art supplies
___ Other

_____

_____

___ Volunteers to help with the following:
___ Support tasks (gathering resources, set up learning centers, etc.)
___ One-on-one teaching tasks (listen to child read, etc.)
___ Small group or class teaching tasks (perform or help with music, read to class, supervise parties or field trips, etc.)
___ Other

4. What areas do you feel the center needs to address?

5. What methods have you found effective for improving home-school communication (phone calls, newsletters, notes, etc.)?

IV. Parent Participation Program

"The first and primary prerequisite for effective parent involvement is the right attitude. Teachers have to *want* parent involvement in early childhood and school programs; otherwise, parent involvement won't be as effective as it could be. A teacher must not feel threatened by parents, and must sincerely believe that parent involvement will increase opportunities for all." (Morrison, 423) Next, the administration must also be ready for the parents; support must be absolute. "Parents must have meaningful involvement, not the kind they feel is wasting their time and talents." (Morrison, 424) The third critical factor for parent involvement is planning. Know what parents will do before they become involved. Be flexible, however. Consider parent strengths, weaknesses, interests, children, etc. "Provide for all levels of abilities, desires, and needs. Don't expect the same participation from every parent, nor all parents to want to do the same thing. Regardless of how much or little a parent can or wants to be involved, give them the opportunity to participate." (Morrison, 424)

Come up with creative ways to involve all parents; give some extra attention to hesitant parents. Perhaps have a parent involvement committee consisting of staff and/or parents. If this is your first attempt at trying a formal parent involvement program, you may wish to provide staff inservice training and a

parent orientation session. Brainstorming activities, two-way communication skills, listening skills, diversity issues, conference methods, and classroom design are items to be covered. Orientation topics would consist of the center's philosophy, teachers' styles and philosophies, goals and objectives for classroom and children, rules of the center and classroom, specific tasks of volunteers, and classroom management techniques. (Morrison, 424)

Spark enthusiasm in your staff; encourage them to become more involved in the parent involvement program. Just as children need to be encouraged, reassured and rewarded, so do adults! One administrator added involvement into her teacher's employment contract. In this way, teachers knew they had to participate in three events/activities per month. They agreed to this when they were hired and signed the contract; it held them responsible and gave them responsibility.

A. Philosophy

It is a good idea to develop a center philosophy for your parent involvement program. This philosophy would express where your organization stood on involvement of staff and parents. Goals and objectives would also be given. "Based on surveys and your review of home-school communication, choose three to five parent involvement goals for your school. Two or three should be realistic short-term goals that can be accomplished in six to nine months. The rest should be long-term goals, to be accomplished over a period of two to five years. Put your plans in writing - goals, step-by-step plans, time lines and budget." (PTA, 7)

In this way, all staff are coming from the same perspective and all parents have a basis to start their involvement. Following are three sample parent/family involvement philosophies, two by Mick Coleman (1994) and one from the National PTA (1992). The sample policy by the National PTA is directed toward elementary school families, but can easily be adapted to suit the preschool-age child. Involve the teaching staff with the design of the center's philosophy; they will be an essential part of the involvement program.

Examples of Family Involvement Philosophies

Example #1

Family and school are two of the most important social institutions in the lives of young children. It is within families and schools that young children learn about their world, develop a sense of social responsibility, and acquire social interpersonal skills. All of these traits are important for a healthy, productive, and enjoyable life.

The goal of the **(name of school)** family involvement program is to establish family-school continuity by providing mutually supportive and inviting environments which challenge children to learn and practice positive life skills. This goal is based upon the following assumptions.

1. Children grow and develop best when parents and teachers communicate on a routine basis.

2. Parents and teachers are most effective when they respect one another and honestly share their likes, dislikes, needs, and interests.

3. Teachers have the responsiblity to learn about children's lives outside the classroom in order to develop meaingful classroom learning environments.

4. Parents have the responsibility to share with teachers what they believe to be information about their child's home life that can support their child's classroom learning.

5. Teachers and parents have the responsibility to build upon the learning experiences that children experience in family, home, and community settings.

Individual classroom family involvement objectives will be established each year. A committee of no less than five parents, two school personnel (one of which is to include the classroom teacher), and three students will participate in the developing the objectives. The parents and school personnel will decide how best to seek input from the student representatives. All families and students are invited to participate in all planning meetings.

(Continued, next page)

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Example #2

Family involvement is important to both families and schools. It is through family involvement that parents and teachers share vital information that can be used to promote the growth and development of young children. Without family involvement, children's lives can become fragmented and confusing. Family involvement thus serves as the mechanism for helping children to make the important transition from the family into the greater social environment.

The goal of the **(name of school)** family involvement program is to promote children's growth and development in the home and school. This goal rests upon the assumption that children's growth and development is the mutual responsibility of parents and teachers. Working together, parents and teachers are charged with creating home and school environments that are supportive of children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth and development. The following objectives are established for **(the academic school year)**. These objectives will be reevaluated at the end of the school year.

1. Parents and teachers will meet once a month to discuss children's growth and development at home and at school. Working together, parents and teachers will schedule a location and time that is at, or close to, the home or school. Each meeting will last no longer than one hour.

2. Parents and teachers will arrive at the meeting with comments, questions, or concerns that are to be shared in a respectful and thoughtful manner. In addition, teachers will provide parents with materials from their child's portfolio. Parents will describe to teachers an event, activity, or discussion that they felt reflected on their child's physical, cognitive, or social-emotional growth and development.

3. The school will provide monthly family workshops on topics to be determined by a survey of parents. All workshops will be conducted at the school on the second Wednesday night of each month. Parents will receive reminder notices at the beginning of each month.

4. Parents will participate in at least one school/community activity per year. Activities will include, among others, parent workshops, mall art exhibit, children's play, field trips, classroom educational activities, school and classroom parent-teacher policy committees. Parents should feel free to recommend additional activities to teachers.

Table 3

Planning and Organizational Guide

Sample Policy:

Parent Involvement Policy

The Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goals of the school district to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Although parents are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they share the school's commitment to the educational success of their children. School districts and schools, in collaboration with the parents, shall establish and develop programs and practices that enhance parent involvement and reflect the specific needs of students and families.

To this end, the Board will support the development, implementation and regular evaluation of a parent involvement program which will involve parents at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The parent involvement program will be comprehensive and coordinated in nature and will include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Support to parents as leaders and decision makers in advisory roles.

2. Promotion of clear two-way communication between the school and the family as to school programs and children's progress.

3. Assistance to parents and or guardians to develop parenting skills to foster positive relationships at home that support children's efforts and provide techniques designed to assist their children with learning at home.

4. Involvement of parents, with appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at the school.

5. Provision of access to and coordination of community and support services for children and families.

These forms of involvement are not mutually exclusive and require a coordinated schoolwide effort.

Submitted by:
Heather School PTA
San Carlos, California

This sample policy is based, in part, on the *Parent Involvement Policy* adopted in 1989 by the California State Board of Education.

B. Communication

Enough cannot be said about positive, continual, two-way communication when it comes to truly involving parents with the child care setting. This does not mean that center staff has the right to know personal details about a child's family. Please consider what information is needed for staff to care for children on a daily basis. Communication should not translate into gossip; ask yourself if parents must know similar types of information about their child's teacher. For example, a teacher may believe that she should know if a child's parents are divorcing "in order to give the child more attention while at school." In that regard then, should a parent know if his/her child's teacher is going through a divorce so that he/she might "give the child extra attention while at home?" Of course not; keep in mind that communication then is not an excuse to gossip among staff.

Stonehouse (1980) proposes twenty guidelines for staff in "Relating to Parents Daily":

- Have an attitude of respect toward parents.
- Be cautious giving advice to parents.
- An open door makes parents feel welcome.
- Give clear expectations of parents and center from the beginning.

- At first, have one staff member relate to parents.
- Use parents as a source of information about the child.
- Involve parents in discussions about their child.
- Talk with parents.
- Get to know parents personally.
- Realize parents are people and have other concerns.
- Share everything positive about their child.
- Share unpleasant information more sparingly.
- Avoid stereotyping parents.
- Accept individual differences in parents.
- Acknowledge that you may not relate well to some parents; maybe other staff can.
- As staff, support each other with difficult parents.
- Be a good listener.
- Know the limits of your own competence; refer parents if need be.
- See things from the parents' perspective.
- Keep trying with difficult parents. (6-7)

"Communication is the key to effective involvement of families." (Bredekamp, 61) "Often the information parents are asked to share is limited to

emergency, health, and development history, which are all critical. Invite parents to also share their personal perspective on their child and his or her relationship to your program." (Early Childhood Today, Aug/Sept 1993) Communication comes easy at the beginning of a school year or as a new child enrolls in your center. The difficult part is keeping communication systems going throughout the year. "To increase your ongoing communication, set aside some time to analyze what is and isn't working in the systems you've been using, and try some creative new ideas. Remember that parents' styles of communicating may be as diverse as their children's." (Early Childhood Today, Nov/Dec 1993, 27)

Consider some specific things when analyzing the communication systems currently in place at your center:

- Does each and every parent get greeted when they come and go each day?
- If you are busy, do you make it clear to parents when you will be available?
- Is there a designated place for all parents to pick up messages and notices? Put individual parent mailboxes on or by your door. Display a bright flag/sign when there is special mail in the boxes.
- Are you calling attention to special events in a way that is different from daily communication? Choose the same color paper each time you send parent notices. Or, if you use white paper, mark each with a brightly colored marker

along the edge.

- Is there a spot in the center where you can talk with parents out of ear shot of children, staff, and other parents?
- If you personally do not see parents, do you have a consistent way of communicating with them-telephone, notes?
- Have you examined your own style of communicating and, if so, how well does it match parents' styles?
- Do you know which parents are more comfortable with informal or formal, written or verbal communication? Create a short weekly or monthly parent newsletter. Ask for a parent volunteer to produce it; include illustrations from the children.
- Are you sharing positive daily events with parents and showing an interest with parents as people? Or do you talk with them only to pass information, or when there is a problem? Remember, you are creating a model for the way parents will feel comfortable communicating with you. For ongoing communication about individual children, try small notebooks; store one on top of each child's cubby. You use one side for questions and notes, and parents use the other side. (27)

C. Ways to Involve Parents

1. Administrators

Several ways and activities to involve parents in your program are mentioned. None of the strategies suggested are the magic solution; ask staff members what they have seen that works. Coleman (1991) recommends establishing "a file of successful parent participation strategies for review by new teachers." (20) Talk with other child care centers; brainstorm as a team. These strategies, along with the right attitude by all staff, and a good communication system will make the difference. This recipe will increase the level of parent participation in your center.

Before setting up a parent involvement program, survey the staff and parents for their views and needs. This should supply you with many ideas. After initiating **any** form of involvement program, again survey the parents to get feedback. An involvement program should not be written in stone; be flexible and open to suggestions and make any necessary changes. Several resources are listed in the references list at the end of this handbook; utilize them and research more from your local library and early childhood association.

Coleman (1991) suggests:

- "Include topics that relate to both classroom and family environments when developing informational newsletters, public relations material, and parent meetings. Family strengths, parent-child communication, childhood stress, and in-home safety all have the potential to affect children's classroom behavior. Equally important, these topics also relate to family well-being. Schools can offer information and educational programs that give parents practical solutions on topics like these and others." (18) Conduct parent-teacher role plays that address the concerns that parents from various families might bring with them to a conference.

Morrison advises the following strategies:

- Workshops - to introduce parents to the center's philosophies, policies, procedures, teaching styles.
- "Family nights, cultural dinners, carnivals, potluck dinners - to bring parents and the community to the center in nonthreatening, social ways." (425)
- Training programs - to give parents skills to become classroom aides.
- "Fairs and bazaars - to involve parents in fund raising." (425)
- Performances - "programs in which children have a part tend to bring parents to the center; however, the purpose of the children's performances should not

be to get parents involved." (425)

- "Home learning materials and activities - a monthly calendar of activities is one good way to keep parents involved in their children's learning." (425)
- "Participation in classroom and center activities - while not all parents can be directly involved in classroom activities, those who can should be encouraged." (425) Support, guidance, training, and feedback are very important for continued participation.
- "Support services such as carpooling and babysitting - to make attendance and involvement possible." (425)
- Welcoming committee - a good way to encourage involvement is to have other parents contact new parents when their child joins the program.

2. **Child Care Setting**

Coleman advises setting "up a family life center in the school - or in a corner of the classroom - from which parents can check out informational materials and educational games . . . " (20) While Morrison adds "resource libraries and materials centers - parents benefit from books and other materials relating to parenting. Some programs furnish resource areas with comfortable chairs to encourage parents to use them." (425)

Early Childhood Today (1993) covers a few points in a checklist relating to the child care setting:

- Parent bulletin boards are easy to see and can be filled with relevant information such as schedules, rosters, menus, staff pictures and names.
- Provide low chairs for parents to sit in as they wait and watch in their child's room.
- Provide an inviting area for parents to chat or sit after they have left their child's room but are not yet ready to leave the center. (56)

3. **Teachers**

"In order to interact effectively with parents, teachers must continuously work at understanding not only what parents want for their children, but also what they want from the school; what contributions they feel they, as parents, can make in their child's learning experience; and what shortcomings or anxieties they may be feeling about this new experience upon which their child is embarking." (Allen, 3) Stipeck, Rosenblatt, and DiRocco give teachers several recommendations.

- Send developmentally appropriate materials and instructions home.
- Loan books for parents to read to their children.
- Send brief notes home to parents to inform them of classroom activities and

ways they can elaborate on the classroom learning at home.

- Provide a monthly class newsletter. Include words to songs sung in class, recipes with suggestions for integrating math and reading skills with cooking. Whatever the activity, describe for parents the basic skill that is being taught with the activity. (7-8)

Gelfer provides an excellent idea for parent-teacher partnership: portfolios. All documentation of communication between parent and teacher would be kept in the child's individual portfolio. Contents include: newsletters sent, written notes and requests by parents, developmental checklists and observations completed by parents, home visit notes, conferences, memos sent to parents highlighting class and individual achievements, assessment reports, parent visits/participation, parent workshops, and letters of appreciation from parents. (165) Gelfer pairs the portfolios with telephone conferences, face-to-face conferences, printed communication, workshops, developmental checklists, home visits, and school visitations to promote a positive parent involvement program.

In an excellent article, Slack discusses the physical environment: the classroom. Parents will visit and, hopefully, participate in the classroom. The environment, while being child-friendly, should welcome parents. She provides questions for teachers to ask themselves regarding their classroom:

- Do I have colorful posters with written explanations of what can be expected to occur in each of the learning centers?
- Have I rearranged the materials on the parent bulletin board recently?
- Is there a comfortable place for parents to sit and observe?
- Do I have a poster with photos and short biographies of myself and assistant teachers on the bulletin board?
- Are the materials I have out and the music and stories I share reflective of the families in my classroom? (47)

Slack also reviews ways teachers can have parents participate in the classroom:

- Observing their child in the classroom.
- Joining a planned activity - sitting with the children during story time.
- Being there to offer an extra lap, give a hug or wipe away tears.
- Conducting an activity planned by the teacher, such as reading a story to a small group.
- Working on an activity that can be duplicated at home, such as cooking, where children have many things to do, like measuring, mixing, stirring.
- Making games or books at school that a parent and child can use at home.
- Bringing something from home to share that a parent and child chose together.

- Organizing an activity in conjunction with the curriculum/lesson plan.
- Volunteering as an assistant teacher, initiating and carrying out classroom activities.
- Conducting an inservice for teachers, such as sign language. (49-50)

She goes on to remind teachers of tips for when parents are in the classroom:

- Smile and welcome parents when they arrive.
- Provide nametags.
- Show parents where the adult bathroom and coffee pot are.
- Introduce parents to other adults and children in the classroom.
- Take time to explain what the parents will see and the reasons for classroom rules they may not understand.
- If parents are working in an area, suggest ideas on how to use the materials and words to use.
- Check in with the parent to see how things are going.
- Thank them at the end of the day and invite parents back to the classroom. (50)

4. **Conferences**

I will cover parent-teacher conferences briefly; this subject could be covered in a handbook all by itself. At the end of this section will be a copy of Mick Coleman's (1991) list of questions for parents to ask teachers during a conference. Supply parents with this (or a similar) list of questions that they can ask throughout the year. Some basic rules for conferences (in order to foster positive, active parent involvement in your center) include: creating a comfortable environment, ensure plenty of time, show child's projects, begin with saying some thing positive about their child, ask open-ended questions, limit the number of objectives to be covered, have shorter and more frequent conferences, follow up with a letter covering what was discussed. (18-19) Morrison adds: plan ahead for the conference/be prepared, give parents a chance to talk, learn to listen to the parent, and develop an action plan for you and the parent to carry out before a designated time. (426-7) Bjorkland and Burger recommend that the teacher speak no more than 50% of the time.

5. **Activities**

When a new parent enrolls their child into your center, provide them with a list of ways that you will meet them half way to create an optimum environment

for their child. Include ways that they can become involved in the center. Following are some center activities and events that should attract parents to become involved in your center and their child's education. By all means, brainstorm with your staff to come up with many more suggestions!

Frosty's birthday (mid-January); adopt senior adults (visit retirement home); mid-winter potluck dinner; Valentines (mail picture of child to parents' work); parent appreciation week (parent tips each day, carnation); Mother's day tea party; after taxes day (free tuition); week of the young child (NAEYC); Father's day breakfast or tee ball or tie dye ties; children's art show; family picnic; grandparents' day; family Olympics; family luau; Halloween (invite community); multi-cultural festival; Earl of sandwich day (six-foot sub, stone soup); one stop holiday shop at center (involve community); giving tree; community parade.

Again, at the end of this section, a checklist for parent involvement is provided (PTA). It is designed with elementary school in mind, but can be adapted to fit preschool developmental needs.

In conclusion, and perhaps most important, some parents will not be able to or may not want to become involved more than they presently are. This does not show a lack of interest in their child, the child's education, or your center. Other activities, to involve working parents, must be brainstormed. Good Luck!

Table 2. Questions for Parents to Ask Teachers

1. How is my child progressing in his/her growth and development? Ask to see examples of your child's work. Ask the teacher for examples of your child's social skills.
2. What types of motivators and rewards are used to reinforce my child's growth and development?
3. What is my child's classroom behavior like (e.g., listening, following directions, participating in class activities, attitude, work habits)? Ask the teacher for specific examples of your child's classroom behavior.
4. What are my child's most and least favorite activities?
5. How is my child's progress assessed? How often is my child assessed? Ask to see copies of the assessment instruments.
6. What types of rules is my child expected to follow in the classroom? How is my child informed of these rules? What consequences follow when my child breaks a rule?
7. How often is homework assigned? What role would the teacher like me to play in helping my child with homework?
8. What special services (e.g., after-school care, physical health screenings, tutoring, counseling, sick care) are provided by the school?
9. How can the school help me locate community services should my child need help with his or her academic work or behavior?
10. How can I help my child to continue to do well in school?
11. How can I help the teacher to accomplish the classroom goals that he/she has set for the year?
12. How does the school keep parents informed about schedules, policies, events, and problems? Is there a classroom newsletter?

Checklist for Parent Involvement

A school encourages parent involvement in many ways. Here are some of them:

- [ ] Signs that say "Parents Are Welcome Here" - in all languages spoken by parents in your school community.

- [ ] Suggestion boxes
- [ ] Parent surveys
- [ ] Teacher surveys

- Written school to home communication
  - [ ] Newsletters
  - [ ] Information packets
  - [ ] Letters
  - [ ] Student newspaper
  - [ ] Other _____

- [ ] Home visits

- Volunteers in school
  - [ ] Classroom
  - [ ] Office
  - [ ] Library
  - [ ] Lunchroom
  - [ ] Other _____

- Parents as advocates and co decision makers
  - [ ] Advisory committees (budget, discipline, attendance, curriculum)
  - [ ] Problem solving committees (building and grounds usage, vandalism on school grounds, redesigning a report card)
  - [ ] School councils
  - [ ] Other _____

- [ ] Grandparents Day
- [ ] Group meetings other than PTA
- [ ] Resources for parents to check out (located in specific area in school)
- [ ] Breakfast, lunch or dinner at school for parents
- [ ] Slide presentation or video introducing school to new parents
- [ ] After school tutoring sessions - parent and child together
- [ ] Activities to help families under stress
- [ ] PTA meetings - but call them "get togethers" or "workshops" to make them more inviting
- [ ] Open House for parents
- [ ] Agency referral for families
- [ ] Parent group trips
- [ ] Ongoing in service on parent involvement for teachers and principals

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APPENDIX G

HANDBOOK REVIEW SURVEY: FORM, STYLE, AND FORMAT

APPENDIX G

HANDBOOK REVIEW SURVEY: FORM, STYLE, AND FORMAT

Please circle the number corresponding to your given answer:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

1. The writing style of handbook is orderly and clear.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

2. The handbook is written in a manner that makes it easy to read and follow.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

3. The format of the handbook is laid out in a manner that makes it easy to understand and follow.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

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APPENDIX H

HANDBOOK EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE: CONTENT

APPENDIX H

HANDBOOK EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE: CONTENT

Please circle the number corresponding to your given answer:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

1. Enough information was provided in the handbook to adequately explain parent involvement.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

2. The data provided in the handbook was adequate for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

3. Enough material was provided in the handbook for child care administrators to use to increase the level of parent involvement in their centers.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

4. The quality of the measurement tools provided in the handbook for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement in their centers was good.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

_____

APPENDIX I

ADMINISTRATOR CRITIQUE SURVEY

APPENDIX I

ADMINISTRATOR CRITIQUE SURVEY

Please circle True or False in response to each statement and expand in the spaces provided.

1. The material covering the subject of parent involvement would be beneficial to child care administrators seeking to increase the level of involvement at their centers. Agree Disagree Not Sure

Comments _____

_____

2. The suggestions given in the handbook regarding ways to involve parents in the child care center were plentiful and covered all aspects of the child care setting.

Agree Disagree Not Sure

Comments _____

_____

3. The measurement tools provided for child care administrators to measure the current level of parent involvement were broad enough to be used after a program of parent involvement was revised. Agree Disagree Not Sure

Comments _____

_____

APPENDIX J

ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDBOOK

APPENDIX J

ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDBOOK

Please respond to the following subjects in as much detail as possible. Your participation is appreciated.

1. Readability of the handbook:

_____

_____

2. Strategies suggested in the handbook:

_____

_____

3. Quality of teacher and parent surveys provided in handbook:

_____

_____

4. Selection of activities recommended for parent involvement/participation:

_____

_____